



Endless Opportunities

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Ron C. Cross

SCHOOL HAS STARTED FOR US ALL!!!

By Ron C. Cross
Board of Commission Chairman

The Columbia County Board of Commissioners (BOC) will join over 20,000 County students this month in trying to expand our knowledge to deal with some important issues. However, in our situation it means a two-day workshop rather than nine months of learning activities. On August 31, and September 1, 2005, we will meet in Oconee County and hear some "experts" on several current issues. Below are several topics of importance that we will discuss:

INCORPORATION AND CONSOLIDATION: This topic has been considered several times in recent years and is currently back in discussion because of recent State legislation that eliminated the three-mile buffer requirement. Because of that action initiated by Sandy Springs in Fulton County, unincorporated areas can now establish incorporated areas up to the borders of other incorporated entities.

Incorporating a city in Columbia County would bring an additional \$5 million to the city in utility franchise fees from the utility companies. There would be no increase in utility charges except possibility in isolated areas served by co-ops. Franchise fees only go to incorporated communities such as Grovetown and Harlem. However, we do not want to create an additional layer of government with its associated expense. The best plan would be to incorporate and consolidate at the same time and avoid the creation of a city government. We have been told by the legal authorities that this is possible, and we hope to learn how from the people at the Carl Vinson School of Government of the University of Georgia.

The benefits of incorporation are both immediate and long range. The extra revenue is important, but the largest advantage is the time in the future when Columbia County becomes the population center of the region. Being a consolidated government and the population center offers many possibilities for programs, grants, and revenue from the federal government. As evidenced from past attempts, this is not a simple issue and many discussions must be held with the present cities in the County and all citizens. However, there seems to be no reason not to consider this at this time. This effort will require legislative action from our delegation and a vote from County citizens.

CIVIC CENTER/ARENA: The Arena Committee presented their study results to the BOC on August 16th with a recommendation to begin a feasibility study to gather information for the citizens to review prior to a vote on the issue. The committee unanimously agreed that an arena would be desirable for this region with financing by property taxes the very last option. The feasibility study will provide conceptual drawings, desired locations, cost of construction, financing options, partnership possibilities, revenue expectations, and other required data. However, the study is expensive and the commission must decide how this too is to be financed if it is given approval. This project is an opportunity for Columbia County to do something really special, but only if the citizens desire it.

ADDITIONAL BOND ISSUES: Consultants from our bond underwriters and from our capital improvement program managers will be helping us decide on a bond proposal to finance stormwater and transportation projects as well as to fund future land acquisitions. Our current stormwater fee does not generate enough funds to do the necessary construction. With the above average rainfall we have experienced this year, our stormwater problems have been magnified. A bond issue, similar to the previous issue involving water line extension and SPLOST projects, would let us accelerate needed improvements and also avoid future cost increases. Our AA bond rating, one of only five in the state, makes this a very attractive option.

CONVENTION AND VISITOR BUREAU (CVB): Our present agreement with the Metro Augusta CVB expires at the end of the year, and the BOC has voted not to renew. We are making plans to start our own bureau and will discuss the vision that we have for this new agency. We feel that the money generated - projected to be \$160,000 next year - can be better utilized by our own bureau than one located in Augusta.

IMPACT FEES: Most counties with a high growth rate, such as Columbia County, have either implemented impact fees or are considering them. With good strategic planning, our water and sewer services are in pretty good shape, but there are areas such as stormwater and roads where developer fees could be very useful. We will study options and begin planning to discuss these with local developers and also County division heads as we consider the "impact" of impact fees.

It is an exciting time in Columbia County!! Within six months, we will have a major shopping center in operation, our new library and amphitheater will be completed, and several other large projects are under construction. But the beat goes on. The reward for work well done is more work to do. We have a lot of decisions to make in the near future that will influence the welfare of our County for many years. The citizens will probably have two or more votes to cast that will shape the County for many years. The learning curve is steep, but the rewards for our children and grandchildren are exceptional. We will do all in our power to provide the best information possible to assist all of us in our final decisions. With Ben, Barry, Sue, and Jim working for us in Atlanta and Charlie, Johnny, and Saxby in Washington, our potential is unlimited.

UPCOMING SPLOST PROJECTS

SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) projects are ongoing. The following is a list of projects that will begin soon and their location in the County (see map). For more information on these and other SPLOST projects, please call 868-3356.

1 Savannah Rapids Pavilion

- a. Roof and deck renovation and retaining wall
- b. New bridge and expanded road and parking

2 Reed Creek Wetland Interpretive Center

3 Sidewalks at school on Mullikin Road

4 Riverside boat ramp parking lot

5 New library

- a. Fixtures and furniture for new library
- b. Performing Arts Center light, sound, and rigging
- c. Library café equipment

6 Emergency Operations Center and Sheriff's substation

7 Intersection of Hardy McManus and Washington Roads

8 Blanchard Woods Park – 5 soccer fields, parking, and lighting

9 Hardy Road paving

10 Blanchard Park lighting

11, 13, 14, 16 New fire stations

12 New sewer line and parking lot at Patriots Park

15 Addition to Central Shop

Bids received

Preparation for bid

Preparation for bid

Out for bid

Out for bid

Out for proposals

Out for bid

Proposals received

Bids received

Bids opened

Preparation for bid

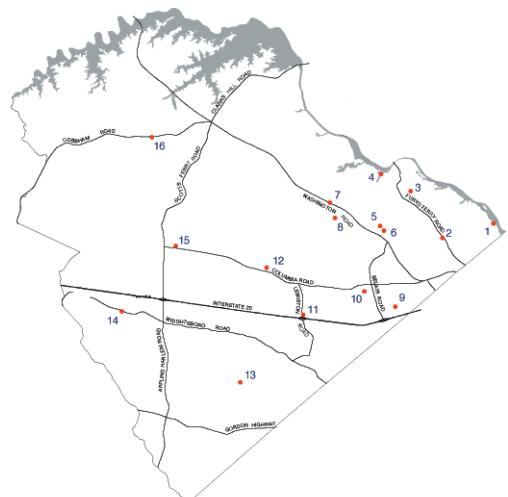
Out for bid

Out for bid

Bids received

Preparation for bid

Bids received



This map shows the projected SPLOST project areas within Columbia County.

Evans Town Center Park



For years, Doctors Hospital has generously allowed the citizens of Columbia County to use the 17 acres surrounding its Ronald Reagan facility for passive recreation. In order to continue this legacy in the heart of the Evans Town Center, the Columbia County Board of Commissioners has a contract to purchase this park property. J B and A Park Design Studio of Atlanta developed a preliminary conceptual Plan which includes a grand lawn area, secondary lawn space and a third smaller open lawn for this space.

This conceptual Park Master plan has been developed to allow the proposed park facility to be used for both active and passive

recreational purposes, special event activities, concerts, and festivals. It features a central 600 foot pedestrian mall esplanade with a center water feature. Other amenities featured in the conceptual design are a plaza area with a pavilion and restrooms, parking areas, and an adjoining bike path. A public meeting will be held September 19th at the Evans Government Center auditorium at 6:30 PM. Public input is being sought to ensure that the park will have the amenities desired yet still remain an open space for community gatherings.

The proposed Park space is located on Ronald Reagan Dr. at North Belair Rd. and is centrally located in the middle of the Evans Town Center.

Public Hearings

The Corridor Protection Overlay District (CPOD) is intended to protect and enhance the environmental and aesthetic quality of some major roads in Columbia County. CPOD requirements are also meant to protect motorists from excessive visual distraction while driving on these important corridors. The CPOD does not change the underlying zoning classification of a property but does require additional architectural guidelines and landscaping standards. You can visit the County website (www.columbiacountyga.gov) for further information on proposed standards.

Public hearings will be held in September and October concerning the establishment of new Corridor Protection Overlay Districts on portions of three major roads in Columbia County - Fury's Ferry Road, Washington Road and Columbia Road. All landowners with property affected by the CPOD will be notified by a letter sent to the address listed with the Tax Commissioner's Office. The public hearings will be held in the Evans Government Center Auditorium at 6:30 PM with the following schedule:

- Sept. 1st **Fury's Ferry Road**
- Sept. 15th **Washington Road from Evans to Greenbrier**
- Oct. 6th **Columbia Road between Shady Grove Drive and Washington Road**
- Oct. 20th **Washington Road south of Evans**